

ADDICTED TO PURITY

by author, speaker,
and teacher
Scott Ritsema

**ADDICTED
TO PURITY**

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Published
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Text design by Greg Solie • Altamont Graphics

ISBN: 978-1-5136-2400-6

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Chapter 1: In the Beginning, God

I've often wondered about God's existence in the distant past, in the time before there ever was an earth or people or angels.

God was there.

OK, my little brain can't even get close to comprehending that. So let's instead ponder what we do know about God—some of which can be found in the first three verses of Genesis 1. Even before the six days of creation, we already have God (Father), Spirit (Holy Spirit), and the Word (who later became flesh, Jesus the Son):

Verse 1) In the beginning, God...

Verse 2) the Spirit of God hovering over the waters

Verse 3) the Word of God (when He speaks: "And God said, Let there be light...").

We know from John 1:14 that the Word is Christ, the Son of God.

This three-ness is seen elsewhere in the Scriptures. For example, at His baptism, *Jesus* hears the voice of His *Father*, and the *Spirit* of God descends like a dove (Matthew 3:16, 17). There again you see the three. Likewise, at the end of Jesus' ministry just before Jesus returned to heaven, He told His disciples to baptize "in the name of the *Father* and of the *Son* and of the *Holy Spirit*" (Matthew 28:19). So we see the Three at the beginning of creation, at the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry, and at the end of Jesus' earthly ministry. Powerful!

Have you ever wondered why God said "Let *Us* make man in *Our* image" (Genesis 1:26)? We aren't made in the image of angels, but the image of God! And God said "Let *Us* make man in *Our* image." Interesting! Who is this "Us" that He is referring to?

Have you ever wondered why the Hebrew word translated as "God" in your Bible—*Elohim*—is a plural noun (yes "God" a plural noun!)?

Simply put, the reason why God is referred to with plural nouns and pronouns is because we do not have a singular, solitary God who existed all alone by Himself before creation. No, the Bible

teaches that there are actually three distinct Persons that comprise the Godhead—a perfect unity or oneness. (See Deuteronomy 6:4.)

It's a beautiful way to begin the Scriptures—at the very core of the nature and character of God is perfect relational connectedness, a God who is love. (See 1 John 4:8.)

Now think about this with me. Biblical love is to be centered upon another rather than self. In other words, we know that love is essentially others-centeredness. So if God IS love, then there must have been an 'other' to center His love upon... *even before the creation of angels or humans!*

And Genesis 1:1–3 reveals the fact that even before God loved angels or men, there were three Persons of the Godhead united in perfect love.

Another way to think about it would be this: If you subscribe to a religious belief that there is no plurality to the Godhead, but you simply have Allah or whomever in eternity past existing alone (without the Holy Spirit or the Son) then this god CANNOT be love. It goes without saying that it is impossible to love when there is nobody to love.

In this book entitled, *Addicted to Purity*, we will spend some time each chapter on the topic of love, sexuality, pornography, and relationships. So, one might ask, "Why begin with a segment on the triune nature of our God of love?" The answer to this question is that, as Christians, we aspire to do things the exact opposite of how our culture does it. Our culture starts with the counterfeit trinity of me, myself, and I. We start with Father, Son, and Spirit. We also ask the question, what is God like? And we ask, what is going on in His universe where I find myself?

Indeed, there is a lot going on in this universe. The incredible drama in which we find ourselves began when an arch-enemy sought to usurp God's authority by waging a campaign of deception. This enemy not only challenged God's authority, but he also maligned God's character.

God was now put in a position of needing to vindicate His character to the angels who had heard the accusations of the enemy. In order to end the rebellion, He would have to prove Himself true and show His adversaries to be liars (see Romans 3:4).

And here's the key. As a part of restoring His name He created this world in a way that would reveal His character in a powerfully clear way to both men and angels. Specifically, as the crowning act of the six days of creation, He created mankind "in His own image ... male and female" (Genesis 1:27). He built Adam with His own hands and breathed into Adam's lungs. He created Eve, who was to Adam "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:23).

Are you seeing something about God's character here in the creation of humans? It's pretty evident in this story that God is a *relational* being of love. He created relational beings (inviting them to become one flesh, see Genesis 2:24) and He did so in a very relational manner—building, breathing, bone-of-my-bone, etc. God created the male-female, husband-wife relationship not only to bring blessing and happiness to our lives, but to make a strong point—to *provide abundant evidence to the on-looking universe of the goodness of His character of others-centered love.*

Normally we talk about sexual purity solely in the very important context of biblical morality and obedience to the law of God. But when we pull back the veil on what's really going on in our universe, when we see that God is seeking to vindicate His name in the face of the accusations made against Him in the rebellion, and when we see that God visibly demonstrated before all the universe His relational love when He created mankind, then we begin to view marriage and sexuality in way bigger terms and in a massively huge context.

And here it is in a nutshell: your purity, your godly marriage, your faithfulness to God's design for marriage and sex are meant to be a vitally important spectacle to men and to angels, telling of God's loving and self-sacrificing character, so that He can be proven true!

Think about that. This means that how we live in this area of our lives can be a part of bringing an end to the great controversy, sin, and suffering.

Chapter 2. Counterfeit Intimacy

In Chapter 1, we saw that at the very core of the nature and character of God is His relational character of love—a perfect unity of three eternal persons. John stated it with abundant clarity when he defined God’s character in three words: “God is love” (1 John 4:16).

Since God is love, and since we are created in His image, then we also were created to love and be loved. Relationship is at the core of our existence also.

Evolutionists argue that other than food and water, the most important human need is sex. Yes, you read that right. The claim is obviously false, since numerous people have lived completely celibate lives devoid of any sexual activity, and the lack of sexual activity did not kill them. (“Celibate” means to engage in no sexual activity, whether alone or with another person.)

It is not just evolutionists who promote this nonsense about so-called sexual “needs.” Many individuals convince themselves that having a sexual outlet of some kind is—for whatever reason—necessary for their own personal lives or physical health. And popular culture only piles on the propaganda by promoting the notion of having “my needs” met.

No, there is no such thing as a sexual *need*. Nothing about physiology or psychology would suggest this. However, we do have an actual need, which often goes unfulfilled. And that need is true intimacy.

I don’t mean sexual intimacy necessarily (although the marital relationship is certainly a very close and intimate relationship). By intimacy I simply mean any form of relational connectedness—individual to individual, soul to soul. Think of the closest relationship in your life: that’s intimacy. That’s closeness.

But sadly, in our time, most people do not have enough of this important, life-giving experience of relational intimacy. Perhaps even your most intimate relationships are lacking in honesty, openness, and care. Indeed, it is a tragic paradox that the Internet age has brought us the most “connected” generation in history, but also the emptiest and loneliest generation in history. And it is even more tragic

that within the family, where the need of intimacy ought to be most lovingly fulfilled, the deepest wounds are often inflicted instead.

This is where Satan steps in to offer the poison. To a generation that is chronically intimacy-starved, he dangles a counterfeit intimacy: the sexually alluring woman, the romantic novel or movie, the Hollywood dream or fantasy, the YouTube clip, etc. And the soul that is so starved for true intimacy is easy prey, easily falling into such an attractive trap.

To illustrate the point, have you ever been *extremely hungry* and walked into a convenience store? You know logically that all of that toxic garbage on the snack aisle is not real food, but your eyes land on the Twinkie—the glorious looking Twinkie. It's not food. Obviously. It's a counterfeit of real, actual food. But the temptation is overwhelming because you're even hungrier than you thought.

Now let's flip the script. You walk into the convenience store after having just been fulfilled with a good, healthful meal. The Twinkie doesn't hold the same power over you, and it is relatively easy to walk away.

The same principle applies to sexuality. When we have an abundance of true relational intimacy and closeness—first with Christ, secondly with family, and then with our brothers and sisters in Christ—then we are “filled up.” Our true needs are met. Then we can face sexual and relational temptations with much more strength.

This concept is proven in the research. Studies have shown that men who grew up in emotionally disengaged or broken homes are more likely to become pornography addicts. Why is this? Pornography is a counterfeit intimacy, and these men are starved for intimacy, so the counterfeit has a stronger pull on them, just as the Twinkie is a greater temptation to the person who hasn't had a filling, nutritious meal in a while.

So, sexual “needs?” Think again. Christ has made provision to “satisfy the desire of every living thing” (Psalm 145:16). Every true need is met in relationship with Him and with His people. But in pornography, fantasy, and entertainment, Satan offers something more alluring to fallen human nature. And the masses flock to these to their own destruction. Will we do the same? Or will we turn to the *true* Source who will meet our every need?

Chapter 3: Counterfeit Love

“Mr. Ritsema, if I’m honest, I don’t want Jesus to come back soon. I want to get married and live a happy life first; then go to heaven.” A number of honest students in my Bible classes have admitted this sentiment.

If you’ve thought the same thing, you’re not alone. But I have to say this frankly: While those feelings are real, be honest. They are absolutely illogical.

Gasp! How could you say such a thing!

Well, Hollywood and the music industry have infected us so badly with love-sick sentimentalism that we need a serious slap in the face. And our politically correct, entertainment-saturated culture doesn’t care enough about us to provide the needed wake-up call, the proverbial poke in the eye.

So I’ll be the bad guy: Seriously? Romance, the marriage bed, and a white picket fence... versus heaven? That should be a no-brainer. Struggling with these feelings is a sign of having been influenced by an absolutely toxic culture around us. And that includes most of us, even those who aren’t immersed in worldly entertainment.

The entertainment industry tells us that relationships are for the purpose of fulfilling our romantic dreams and fantasies, delivering good feelings of romance, happiness, and sexual pleasure. But when you look at the marriages in Hollywood, “happily ever after” is not the phrase that comes to mind. Why are they failing? Why are so many marriages in our society failing? Simply put, the counterfeit of love presented in today’s entertainment industry and lived out by most of the stars and most people in society is lacking the very essence of true love.

So what is true, actual “love” anyway? This English word is terribly worn out, and has lost nearly all of its meaning. I love God, I love my wife, and I love... pizza? You get the point.

Let’s look at the essence of true love. When the Bible says that “God is love,” the Greek word for “love” used here is “*agape*.” It communicates the essential principle of the Christian faith:

self-sacrifice. Rather than “love,” “agape” is probably better translated, “relational, self-sacrificing beneficence.”

True, biblical love is caring about another’s needs, desires, and benefit to such an extent that you set aside your desires, preferences, and pleasures in order to bless them. Hollywood’s version of love is the exact opposite. It is selfish, self-gratifying, and self-oriented. True biblical love is a principle to be acted upon; the counterfeit love of the world is a transient feeling.

Pure and holy affection is not a feeling, but a principle — *Messages to Young People*, p. 435).

Of course, when we truly love somebody—when we set aside our desires for another’s benefit in order to bless and uplift them—wonderful feelings will often follow. And relational connectedness. And the most intimate, self-sacrificing relationship of all (marriage) has all sorts of wonderful aspects to it: emotional, physical, spiritual. So, feelings of some kind do follow when biblical love is exercised; but if the feelings, themselves, become the point, then we’re in serious danger. We’ve put the cart before the horse. We’re chasing after the wind. We’re on shifting sands. In fact, we’re warned very seriously to avoid this feelings-based romanticism: “Imagination, lovesick sentimentalism, should be guarded against as would be the leprosy” (*The Adventist Home*, p. 51).

In other words, avoid those books, songs, and movies like the plague! They will bathe you not only in feelings-based romance, but also in another subtle counterfeit of love: the “I can’t live without you” or “I need you” sentiment. This is a *taking* mindset, which psychologists refer to as emotional dependency. But true love has a *giving* mindset that lives a life of self-sacrificing love.

To sum it up, God’s version of love is self-sacrifice. The world’s counterfeits are self-centered and feelings-based, leading to a draining dependency dynamic. Two selfish people in a relationship or two emotionally dependent people in a relationship “needing” each other is a train wreck waiting to happen.

However, two Christ-centered, self-sacrificing people in a marriage relationship is a gift from God and a witness to others

of God's character, and a joy to the married couple and to their children.

Chapter 4. The Brain on Pornography

“Once I get married, then these temptations will finally go away.” This is how many youth have consoled themselves and eased their consciences when they feel guilt because of the sin in which they’ve become trapped.

To the young lady captured by infatuation, to the young man captivated by lust (or vice versa), I urge you to consider the millions of married men and women who have made a shipwreck of their lives by falling to temptation while married. Would they say that getting married, in and of itself, gave them victory over the sexual sins of our age? Of course not.

Seventy percent of men in the church today—most of them married—admit in anonymous surveys that they struggle with pornography in their daily lives. And a sizeable portion of women struggle as well. Millions of men and women get involved in online anonymous relationships or have affairs through social media platforms. Marriages today are struggling, and that’s putting it mildly; yet most of the wreckage remains hidden from the public eye.

Why are temptations so strong during the teen years? Well, Satan knows that God is gathering an army of youth to proclaim the climactic three angels’ messages to usher in the final events of earth’s history. Christ is waiting for that chosen generation to rise upon the scene. But sadly, many are being spiritually amputated by temptation, waiting for marriage to come and remove sexual temptation. Yet marriage doesn’t remove temptation. In fact, a teen should not even count on having another five or ten years for that time of marriage to come! (See *Maranatha*, p. 109.)

Why temptation remains so strong during marriage hasn’t been understood until recently. In fact, what the science has discovered about pornography, in particular, is still not appreciated like it should be. In the words of Dr. Jeffrey Satinover, testifying before the U.S. Senate, we see how alarming this problem of pornography

use really is: “[M]odern science allows us to understand that the underlying nature of an addiction to pornography is chemically nearly identical to a heroin addiction.”

Many people excuse themselves with the fact that they’ve only viewed it a few times, maybe a couple times per year or so. It’s not a big problem for me, they think. Question: *would you have that same mindset if you were using narcotic drugs a couple times a year?*

Would you think, “Heroin isn’t a big problem for me; I only use it occasionally”? Probably not. Pornography isn’t healthy in any dose. It’s literally just like a drug. Listen to the testimony of Dr. Judith Reisman, also before the U.S. Senate: “Pornography triggers a myriad of endogenous, internal, natural drugs that mimic the ‘high’ from a street drug. Addiction to pornography is addiction to what I dub erototoxins—mind altering drugs produced by the viewer’s own brain.”

Brain scans paint an even more serious picture of the problem. Scans of a pornography addict’s brain reveal worse problems than a cocaine addict’s brain! It’s a very, very, serious situation that calls for a major intervention.

The good news is that this is all reversible, and there is so much hope yet to come in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 5. The Lust Cascade

The Israelites were on the borders of Canaan, ready to enter the land of promise. Balak had failed to wrest from his prophet-for-hire, Balaam, the curse upon the Israelites that he so greedily sought. And the arch-enemy, Satan, was wringing his hands, looking for some way to prevent the advance of God’s people.

In this climactic moment, the enemy selected the nuclear option, the ultimate deception to entrap the Israelite men: He sent in the Moabite women. And it worked. Much of Israel fell into sexual infidelity and idolatry. And sadly, what has been will be repeated.

“The very same Satan is now working to the very same end, to weaken and destroy the people who claim to be keeping

the commandments of God, as they are just on the borders of the heavenly Canaan. Satan knows it is his time. He has but little time left now in which to work, and he will work with tremendous power to ensnare the people of God upon their weak points of character. There will be women who will become tempters, and who will do their best to attract and win the attention of men to themselves.” —*Review and Herald*, May 17, 1887

This prediction is being fulfilled today. We are bathed in a completely pornographized, hyper-sexual culture around us. It is impossible to drive on the highway, check the weather, look up information online, and sometimes even go to church, without being slammed with sexually alluring images. And a large swath of *end-times* Israel is falling prey to the lusts of the flesh.

Modern science has shown us the exact neurological process which can be referred to as the “lust cascade.” It is a specific, step-by-step process that takes place in the brain and body. This process is most significant in the male brain, as the female sexual neurology is more complex and involves more of a relational and right brain activity. But the lust cascade as described here does take place in all human brains. Understanding how the temple of God works can give us an advantage in halting the process of lust before it begins.

First of all, the drive center of the brain, where the desires for food, for water, and for sexual pleasure are based, is called the hypothalamus. This area of the brain is hard-wired and not changeable. *Noticing* that food, water, or a person is attractive is not sinful, and that capacity is not going to go away.

Step 1 in the lust cascade: When the image of that attractive person hits the brain, the first area that is activated is called the LGN, which is in the thalamus of the brain. This is also hard-wired, and will automatically, in a millisecond, send the image to the occipital lobe at the back of the brain, where vision is processed.

Step 2: When the eyes are open (and even when the eyes are closed if images are imagined) the occipital lobe is always active. When seeing or imagining a sexual image, there is intense activity

in the occipital lobe, as the brain obsesses on that image. If the image is not immediately discarded and replaced with something else immediately, then this happens:

Step 3: The occipital lobe activity, within less than a second, sends cues to the amygdala, which agitates with increasing intensity the more that the image is dwelt upon; this agitation would be the feeling of lust. The amygdala agitation elicits a gonadotropic response, or in other words, the production of sex hormones. The heartrate increases, the pre-frontal cortex (the seat of the will and self-control) shuts down, and the brain is in reactive mode, responding to the carnal drives of the hypothalamus.

When speaking of the power of these images, especially upon the male brain, prominent brain researches use words like “mesmerize.” They are not exaggerating. The shutting down of the pre-frontal cortex is an extremely serious and dangerous step. This whole process must be arrested from the very beginning. The moment that image is captured by the occipital lobe, it needs to be discarded and replaced with something else. The millisecond decision is where the hinge point is, where sin and lust and a dangerous slippery slope of neurological activity begins. And thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! (1 Corinthians 15:57).

Chapter 6. Effects of the Lust Cascade

Last chapter we saw the prediction that Satan would target *last-days* Israel in the same way he tempted *ancient* Israel—with sexual temptations right before they entered the promised land.

But today, many people think that they can flirt with temptation, and that they are OK as long as they don’t actually commit the physical act of adultery or fornication. They don’t realize that by merely entertaining the *thought*, they are proverbially stepping up to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and taking a bite.

Jesus pointed out in Matthew 5:27-28 that the mere act of lusting is adultery. So simply making the choice to continue to behold an alluring image, or simply viewing, reading, or listening

to that media, magazine, or book, is sin in itself, even if it leads to no physical behavior.

Jesus knew brain science. We now know a bit of it, and so we can start to see why He said what He said about lust.

Last chapter we also looked at the lust cascade and how there is a quick succession, or domino effect, of neurological activation after the eyes are hit with an image, or the mind is prompted with a thought or feeling. There is a brief moment in which we must take the thought captive and make it obedient to Jesus Christ (see 2 Corinthians 10:5) in order to prevent the lust cascade from taking place.

View this process like an onramp to a highway. Satan is directing traffic and he points you onto the onramp. If you follow and get on the highway, it's tough to get off. There are high containment walls and few exits. It's a neurological path where you are almost entirely surrendering your pre-frontal cortex.

The *will* must be engaged immediately to disobey Satan's sexual cue *before* you get on the highway! Everything depends on the right action of the will. And taking the thought captive immediately is the key.

Most people, once they're down the pathway of lust, will, if opportunity avails itself, act out sexually—whether alone or with another person. This is where the lustful thought becomes an adulterous action, for sexual behavior is reserved for only one person—one's spouse in a biblically sanctioned marriage.

Once one acts out sexually, whether through pornography or some other means, there is a drug-like reaction. The brain is hit with intense amounts of dopamine and endogenous (internal) opiates, which are four times stronger than morphine.

And this behavior doesn't occur without tremendous neurological consequences. Since the pre-frontal cortex was left out of the equation, the brain begins to prefer, and even clamor for, fleshly pleasures that are not wisely calculated by the executive centers of the frontal brain. The pre-frontal cortex was de-coupled from the whole experience, and thus gets in the habit of being left out, leading to increased impulsivity, loss of self-control, and more self-centeredness in general.

Also, a chemical called norepinephrine burns the initial arouser into the memory, to call it up at a later time. Since the brain utilized a pathway that proved to bring a tremendous “reward” of pleasure, the pathway is laid down and becomes the preferred pathway, which, if repeatedly used, becomes a vicious habit and finally a crippling addiction.

Simultaneously, the brain pathways of right thoughts and actions are neglected, and literally shrink and don’t demand to be used. “The sensitive nerves of the brain have lost their healthy tone by morbid excitation to gratify an unnatural desire for sensual indulgence” (*Child Guidance*, p. 447).

“They have so long served their lust that it is natural for their thoughts to be impure and their imaginations corrupt. It is as impossible to cause their minds to dwell upon pure and holy things as it would be to turn the course of Niagara and send its waters pouring up the falls. —*Maranatha*, p. 26

Thanks be to God that by giving us a will, He has given us the power to arrest this whole process during that micro-second before the thought is entertained! Even if this is humanly as impossible as reversing Niagara Falls, by God’s power we can do this:

If Satan seeks to turn (the mind) to low and sensual things, bring it back. When corrupt imaginings seek to gain possession of your mind, flee to the throne of grace, and pray for strength from heaven. By the grace of Christ it is possible for us to reject impure thoughts. —*Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene*, p. 136

But I don’t have the will-power to resist! You’re right. We are indeed helpless in our own strength. We don’t have the *power*. So we don’t have will-power. But we do have a will. And... if we exercise our will, He will give us the power. Then we will have the will-power needed to defeat the enemy.

And since it’s God’s power that gets the credit, then He receives all the glory because it was His righteousness not mine, His grace not my merits, that gained the victory.

Chapter 7. A Violent Vice

When I hear about the absolutely twisted sex “education” being taught in the public schools, I shudder with horror. But deception and manipulation are to be expected from the worldly schools. What really shocked me was when I heard the words of a seventh grade teacher in a Christian school:

Kids, today we need to talk about something called masturbation. It’s something that many of you probably already do. I want you to know that it’s OK and good to do. You shouldn’t feel guilty at all, but continue to do it; and those who do not do it will at some point do the same, if you’d like to.

WHAT!? Satan has even wormed his lies into the classrooms of supposed Christian schools, going completely contrary to Peter’s counsel to “abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11). Lust is waging a violent attack upon the soul, and abstaining is the only safety.

Even brain scientists who do not have the benefit of the Spirit of Prophecy understand the danger of this behavior: “Masturbation is playing with neurochemical fire. It affects one emotionally and neurologically.” (William Struthers, *Wired for Intimacy*, p. 172)

This was taught over a hundred years ago by one of the most progressive health reformers and Christian writers in history, Ellen G. White. She wrote extensively about the dangers of masturbation.

Unfortunately, for decades now, people have ridiculed Ellen White’s claims about the effects of this behavior, which was referred to in the 19th century as self-abuse, secret vice, or secret sin. Certainly, some of her statements did sound quite outlandish, and as a result, many have distanced themselves from her comments on the subject, excusing the counsel away by saying, “Oh well, she was merely echoing the unscientific conclusions of the moralists of her time.” But in saying this, the validity and authority of the inspiration behind a godly Christian writer was questioned; and sadly, doubts were insinuated regarding the rest of the biblical counsel that she offered.

Well, recently the Ellen White has been vindicated on this sensitive topic. In the book *An Appeal to Mothers*, Mrs. White warned that this habit can, among other things, lead to pain in the shoulders, side, and back; great exhaustion after exercising; lack of strength or endurance; absentmindedness; day-dreaming and inattention; forgetfulness and a weak memory; and a weakened brain in general.

Again, it does sound unlikely at first glance that masturbation could cause these things. After all, many people are advising children and youth to engage in this behavior! Well, to put it bluntly, those people are way behind recent research. Scientists Cooper and Carnes discovered in their 2001 and 2004 research that masturbation leads to a whole host of problems including, but not limited to, memory problems, lack of focus, concentration problems, fatigue, back pain, and pelvic or testicular pain.

Sound familiar?

Cooper and Carnes also found that depression is a common consequence of frequent masturbation. It should come as no surprise that the Lord was way ahead of this “cutting edge” research when we read in *An Appeal to Mothers* that masturbation can lead to a number of depression symptoms: lack of perseverance; reluctance to engage in active labor; having a gloomy sadness upon the countenance; frequent exhibitions of a morose temper in those who once were cheerful, kind, and affectionate; and being disposed to look upon the dark side. In a word: depression. And she was right again, as the research proves.

Even some of her more hard-to-believe claims are backed up by modern science. Weakened bones and weakened eyesight, a change in complexion, sickness and disease, and many other effects of “secret sin” identified in *An Appeal to Mothers*, are all related to a zinc deficiency, which, in males is a serious effect of this lustful habit. We can now understand why she used the term “self-murder” to describe this health-destroying practice.

Space does not allow for a full analysis of how clearly Ellen White’s counsel on this topic lines up with the recent research. My 6-dvd series entitled “A Greater Lust” covers this topic in depth, including much advice for victory over lust. (Available at beltofruthministries.org).

We would be wise to take seriously Ellen White's counsel: "Will they sacrifice comeliness, health, intellect, and all hope of Heaven, everything worth possessing, here and hereafter, to the demon passion? May God grant that it may be otherwise." (*A Solemn Appeal*, p. 54).

Chapter 8. From Failure to Hope

"I'm such a failure; I might as well not even try." "I messed up again; God could never forgive somebody as bad as me." "I feel so alone." This is the typical emotional-spiritual world for somebody held captive by lust.

The accuser of the brethren has implanted these toxic messages, which are set on repeat in the mind, as one spirals into shame, isolation, and depression.

I want to be crystal clear about a very important distinction. There is a drastic difference between on-going, chronic shame combined with feelings of low self-worth... versus conviction or momentary, appropriate guilt.

If you think about it, guilt is a good thing. God placed the conscience within the frontal lobe of our brain to give us a red flag that we have done something contrary to His law—something hurtful to ourselves, others, or Him. He gave us that uncomfortable feeling so that we would make things right through confession, repentance, and reconciliation.

Chronic shame, however, is when somebody owns their sinful habit as part of their identity—like the feelings of worthlessness expressed above. Seeing one of His children in this state grieves the heart of God. He has already born the punishment we feel we need to inflict upon ourselves through constant self-abasement. He longs to forgive and to cleanse from all unrighteousness.

What is even more tragic is the scientific fact that ruminating over your failures passes the brain over the exact same circuits as the failure itself, thus widening the pathway of sin. Far from being some form of Christian humility, this continual walking in darkness, shame, and isolation—repeating in the mind the sins of

the past—is only making it more likely that the sin will be repeated. No wonder the accuser wants to keep us in this state of mind!

As I was thinking about these themes a few years back, I happened upon Psalm 38 for my personal devotion time. What I found absolutely jumped off the pages at me. I believe this Psalm is meant especially for the person caught in the enemy's snare of lustful behaviors and thoughts.

Rather than seeing Christ say to the woman caught in adultery, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more" (John 8:11), the Psalmist, in verse 2, thinks that the oppression of the accuser (Satan) is actually a condemning attitude of God: "Your arrows pierce me deeply, and Your hand presses me down." He is depressed. As he says in verse 6, "I go mourning all the day long."

In verse 3 he says: "There is no soundness in my flesh..., nor any health in my bones because of my sin." So even his bones and his skin have manifested the consequences of his sin. His body is not in good health. (Is this starting to sound familiar? If not, re-read the previous chapter.)

In verse 7 he says, "My loins are full of inflammation." Some translations render the Hebrew here to be "My side" or "My back" has a "burning" or a "pain." (Hmm... interesting.)

In verse 10 he says, "My heart pants; my strength fails me;" and "as for the light of my eyes, it also has gone from me." So he had a racing heart. But he is of low physical energy, and even his eyesight is weakened! (Are you seeing what I'm seeing here!?)

In verse 11 he says, "My loved ones and my friends stand aloof from my plague." He is isolated and alone, lacking true closeness and intimacy.

In verse 17 he says, "For I am ready to fall, and my sorrow is continually before me." He is in a cycle of expecting to fail, and continuing to walk in shame, remorse, and depression.

If you've read the previous chapter you'll notice that this psalm presents the exact signature of symptoms that somebody struggling with lustful habits also has. We saw that masturbation can lead to each of the symptoms listed here in the psalm: depression, degraded skin and weakened bones, lack of health in general, pelvic pain (side or back pain), a racing heart rate, lack

of strength/endurance, weakened eyesight, and isolation and lack of intimacy.

Gladly, the psalmist finds hope! In verse 18 he declares his iniquity, is in anguish over his sin—true confession and repentance. And in verses 21 and 22 he shouts the victory anthem: “Do not forsake me, O Lord; O my God, be not far from me! Make haste to help me! O Lord, my salvation!”

Chapter 9. Courtship: Why, When, How?

Mr. Ritsema: “What is the purpose or goal of your relationship?”
Student: “Umm ... I just like her.”

Mr. Ritsema: “OK, well why are you choosing to date her; I mean, what is the purpose?”

Student: “She’s just amazing, and we just connect so well.”

In this all-to-common exchange between a caring mentor and a love-struck youth, you see the central dilemma in how our culture relates to the topic of teen dating: it has no end goal at all. The dating relationship exists for its own fun, emotional high, or even physical pleasure. “I just like her.”

Here’s my rapid-fire Dating/Courtship 101.

The most important realization is that the purpose of dating is not dating. Instead, try viewing courtship or dating as an extended interview process, which is intended to culminate in the most important job position for which you will ever hire: ministry partner and co-parent. The courtship process is the act of qualifying and evaluating a candidate for this eternally important position. If that’s the purpose of courtship, then we can draw several important conclusions.

1) If you’re not of sufficient age, maturity, and station in life to hire (i.e. to marry), there is no point in dating somebody or allowing yourself to “like” somebody as more than a brother or sister in Christ. Don’t just feel. Think. Is this a wise feeling to entertain? I’m only 16. Where will this take me?

2) Once you are of marriageable age, don’t “fall in love,” but instead, guard your affections. If you’re too emotionally bonded

while courting, you won't be able to objectively analyze the person's potential faults. "A calm, careful weighing of the matter on both sides is positively essential" (*Messages to Young People*, p. 449).

3) In order to maintain objectivity and avoid excessive emotional bonding, do not get physically involved, since this has an enormous emotional bonding effect. Research has shown that couples who were physically pure before marriage enjoy better marriages, including the physical component of marriage. "But it's just a kiss." Many teens, in their honest moments, admit that "innocent" kissing almost never stops with a simple kiss. It will ruin your spiritual life and bond you to the person so that the break-up is painful or the wisdom of marrying the person can no longer be objectively evaluated.

4) If it's the most important decision of your life, then you will obviously want to benefit from the wisdom and experience of others, especially the approval and active involvement of your parents.

5) The most important part of the interview process is to get to know this person's character and values. If they're dishonest to others, they'll be dishonest to you. If they disrespect their family members, they'll eventually disrespect you (since you'll be a family member). If they get visibly upset, expect a rather scary situation when behind closed doors in the family context. Watch especially how a young man treats his mother. Examine their lifestyle standards (diet, dress, media, worship style, humor, reading material) and ask yourself if they are in harmony with what you'd want for your children.

6) Realize that during dating, courtship, engagement, and the first months of marriage, everybody is on their best behavior. Don't think, "He'll change" or "I'll help her change." That is absolutely foolish. Any flaws you witness before marriage will be almost always be magnified in marriage.

7) Realize that the initial stages of an emotionally intense relationship are characterized by high levels of neurochemical release, which forms the emotional bonding pleasure. God gave us these brain chemicals to form that strong and initial bond with our spouse. But realize that those intense feelings fade within 9-18

months. It's very romantic at first; but, "as a general thing, marriage ends all the devotion manifested during the days of courtship" (*Messages to Young People*, p. 457).

So ask, "When the novelty of marriage is over, will he love me still?" (*Review and Herald*, Jan. 26, 1886).

Remember, true love is not a feeling, but a principle and a commitment. Identifying that principle of self-sacrificing love, perfect integrity, and others-centeredness in your potential marriage partner is the most important part of the interview process. And of course, fostering that principle of the love of Christ in your own heart and mind is a necessary pre-requisite to have before considering pursuing marriage.

For the rest of the story, read *The Adventist Home*, pp. 43–97 and *Messages to Young People*, pp. 434–466.

Chapter 10. Just Take It Away!

Many youth struggling with lust have cried out to God to just completely take their sexual desires away. While this is an understandable request of desperation in the midst of despair, it is important to weigh this sentiment by the Word of God.

The Bible says that we were made in God's image. This includes our sexual and relational nature. The husband-wife relationship is a picture of Christ and the church. (See Ephesians 5.) So it is central to what it means to bear the image of God. Those in-born attractions are not sin, and we should not want them to go away. Certainly, we could afford a massive toning-down in our hyper-sexualized culture; God never intended for us to be so fixated upon sex. But again, our sexual nature is a part of our divine creation.

So if our sexual desires aren't going to be removed, how do we overcome the habitual sinful thoughts and the lusts of the eyes that hold so many captive? After all, it's not just the behaviors we are trying to correct. Remember, the lust cascade must be brought to a halt before it starts, after the eyes have noticed an attractive image, but before the feelings and thoughts begin to take hold. That millisecond after 'noticing' is the moment to take immediate and decisive action.

How do you take action? The first thing to realize is that the goal is never to empty the mind or simply remove a thought. Let me illustrate. Try to not think about an elephant right now. Do not think about an elephant. You just thought about one. Stop thinking about an elephant! It doesn't work, does it? Simply saying, "I'm not going to look" or "I'm not going to think about it" is a plan destined to fail.

The way the brain works is with a series of neurological pathways that every action or thought travels down. Thoughts and actions in which we habitually engage will, over time, form ever-widening pathways in the brain that then become second-nature for the mind to follow.

So what we need to do is re-route the pathway. We want to put up a roadblock from going down the wide path of a bad habit, and instead, force the thoughts down a new pathway, like you're wielding a machete in the jungle to forge a new path. This is hard at first, but eventually, you travel down the new pathway enough that it becomes the new habit!

Far ahead of her time, Ellen White accurately referred to the "channels" of the mind and explained how to re-route the thoughts from sinful to holy ones:

If Christ be the theme of contemplation, the thoughts will be widely separated from every subject which will lead to impure acts. The mind will strengthen by dwelling upon elevating subjects. If trained to run in the channel of purity and holiness, it will become healthy and vigorous. If trained to dwell upon spiritual themes, it will naturally take that turn. But this attraction of the thoughts to heavenly things cannot be gained without the exercise of faith in God and an earnest, humble reliance upon Him for that strength and grace which will be sufficient for every emergency. — *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 408

"If Christ be the theme of contemplation..."

Right now, think of Christ on the cross, think of His kindness to little children, think of Him ministering as our high priest in the heavenly sanctuary.

You didn't think of an elephant just then, did you?

Now that worked a lot better than "don't think of an elephant," didn't it?

The key is to replace impure thoughts with something better! Contemplate Christ, fill the mind with heavenly things. Replace a visual temptation with a very visual Scripture such as "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105).

The most important thing when facing temptation is to deal with temptation before it arrives. If you're not having a substantial personal devotion time, which brings Christ into your day, if you're not walking with God as Enoch did throughout the day, then all of the strategies for overcoming will be paper swords against the arsenal that Satan will throw against you.

So this is the most important paragraph in the entire book. Walk with God. Look and live. Fix your eyes on Jesus, the Author and finisher of the faith. That alone will unlock the treasures of grace and the power to overcome.

Chapter 11. Bouncing Into Holiness

Last chapter we learned that the brain contains a series of pathways or roads that our thoughts travel down, and that we need to forge new pathways and create new habits of thought to replace the old.

The good news about this is that when an old pathway becomes unused, it shrinks down, like an unused path in the woods or field becomes overgrown and eventually unrecognizable.

Romans 12:2 says that we can be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Do you want a new mind?

Let's take a look at some more strategies for having pure thoughts. Last time, we understood that quoting Scriptures and contemplating Christ were excellent alternatives to the tempting thought or image. But there's much more.

Remember that one of the reasons sexual and relational temptations are so potent is because so many of us are starved for true intimacy with Christ, with family, with fellow Christians. Well,

this fact can help us find a solution. Not only must we pursue these healthy forms of intimacy in our lives to “fill up” on the real thing in order to be less tempted by the counterfeit intimacy, but we can also use these eternal truths about intimacy and God’s character in our daily battles.

The sexually alluring image pops in front of your face. What do you do in that moment? Immediately turn away your eyes, and think of your closest loved one and of Jesus. Think of how Jesus and His Father have the closest relationship in the universe, and that we were created to reflect that image to the on-looking universe! And then, thank God for creating you to be a relational being, and even though your sexual nature is going unused in its most direct sense presently, still can be a cue that reminds us of the concept of biblical non-sexual intimacy with our closest loved ones and our Savior.

Now, all of a sudden, Satan’s temptation has backfired on him. Rather than dragging you into counterfeit intimacy of sentimentalism, pornography, or lust, the image he flashed in front of you has actually driven you more deeply into holiness, as you contemplate elevated themes.

Another strategy when hit with a lustful image is to remember that the person that you’re tempted to fixate upon for your own pleasure has been put in a position of being objectified. If they’ve put themselves out there like this, they probably have had a painful past and presently have tremendous insecurities, and are victims in Satan’s snare. Pray for that person! Pray that the Lord would bring them present truth and the gospel of salvation! It is not possible to simultaneously be altruistically, empathetically caring about somebody’s salvation and purity, while also preying upon them for a moment of lustful pleasure. Those two areas of the brain just don’t fire at the same time.

Another strategy that some have used is when the thought or image intrudes upon the mind, recognize it as an offer of Satan to destroy you and immediately say “No, thank you.” Then say authoritatively, “It is written.... Get behind me Satan!” I like the “No, thank you” line because it’s a phrase so commonly used in our daily experience, that it easily becomes habitual, and when spoken,

it naturally leads the mind to act accordingly. Since something has been definitely discarded, the mind wants to move on. It makes for an easy transition into more holy thoughts.

You have a relational sexual nature that is not going away. And temptation will come. The analogy I like to use is this: you will be dropped onto a trampoline. But you're being dropped at an angle whereby the trajectory will naturally bounce you right off the trampoline over the precipice on the other side where you fall to your death. But, the good news is that by exercising a little muscle—exercising the will or power of choice—you can bounce in a different direction and enjoy the experience on the way. You can bounce upward... bounce into holiness.

By using the sexual cue in this way—as a catalyst for a spiritual moment with Christ that perhaps otherwise wouldn't have taken place—Satan's temptation backfires, and true victory is gained! Much more than just escaping temptation, it yields an actual deeper contemplation of spiritual reality and a closer walk with Christ. This way, you are actually gaining territory over Satan, rather than merely preventing him from gaining territory. You storm the gates of hell with the power of Christ and they can't prevail!

Chapter 12. What “Saved” Doesn't Mean

Imagine a doctor reporting to his patient the horrible news that her condition is terminal. Lifestyle choices have contributed to a whole host of problems, which, without serious remedy, will literally kill her. Then the doctor says to her, “You're forgiven”; and then he walks away.

She shouts to him, “Wait, wait! I want to be healed!” But the voice simply echoes down the hall to her, “You're forgiven,” as he offers no healing remedy.

This illustration helps me think about salvation. Growing up, I thought salvation was merely the act of having my sins forgiven. As long as I ask forgiveness, then I'm all set for heaven.

But thinking of it a bit more deeply, that is profoundly absurd. I'm sick with a terminal condition called sin; and without a cure,

I will perish, for the wages of sin is death. (See Romans 6:23.) I certainly need forgiveness for the wrongs I've done against my Lord, but don't I also need healing? (See Isaiah 1:4-6.)

Forgiveness is a necessary component of salvation, but to be "saved" literally means (in the NT Greek) to be "healed." Next time you hear somebody say this, you can now discern how nonsensical it is: *"I don't need to overcome sin; I don't need to be healed from my sinful habits; I only need to be forgiven in order to be saved."* Knowing the meaning of the word "saved" you can see that this theology is literally saying "I don't need to be saved in order to be saved." Yes, it's profoundly absurd, but this is the doctrine being taught in most of Christianity.

Sadly, there is a lot of anxiety among Christians about whether we will truly overcome sin and be saved during the tumultuous days ahead. To ease our minds I want to share a sizeable portion of one of my favorite quotes that should offer us a beautiful picture of how Christ wants to heal us of our wrong sexual habits:

By sin we have been severed from the life of God. Our souls are palsied. Of ourselves we are no more capable of living a holy life than was the impotent man capable of walking. Many realize their helplessness; they are longing for that spiritual life which will bring them into harmony with God, and are striving to obtain it. But in vain. In despair they cry, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?' Romans 7:24, margin. Let these desponding, struggling ones look up. The Saviour is bending over the purchase of His blood, saying with inexpressible tenderness and pity, 'Wilt thou be made whole?'

He bids you arise in health and peace. Do not wait to feel that you are made whole. Believe the Saviour's word. Put your will on the side of Christ. Will to serve Him, and in acting upon His word you will receive strength. Whatever may be the evil practice, the master passion which through long indulgence binds both soul and body, Christ is able and longs to deliver. He will impart life to the soul that is 'dead in trespasses.' Ephesians 2:1.

He will set free the captive that is held by weakness and misfortune and the chains of sin.

The sense of sin has poisoned the springs of life. But Christ says, 'I will take your sins; I will give you peace. I have bought you with My blood. You are Mine. My grace shall strengthen your weakened will; your remorse for sin I will remove.' When temptations assail you, when care and perplexity surround you, when, depressed and discouraged, you are ready to yield to despair, look to Jesus, and the darkness that encompasses you will be dispelled by the bright shining of His presence.

When sin struggles for the mastery in your soul, and burdens the conscience, look to the Saviour. His grace is sufficient to subdue sin. Let your grateful heart, trembling with uncertainty, turn to Him. Lay hold on the hope set before you. Christ waits to adopt you into His family. His strength will help your weakness; He will lead you step by step. Place your hand in His, and let Him guide you.

Never feel that Christ is far away. He is always near. His loving presence surrounds you. Seek Him as One who desires to be found of you. He desires you not only to touch His garments, but to walk with Him in constant communion. —*The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 84, 85

Chapter 13. I Will Do a New Thing

Do not remember the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert. —Isaiah 43:18, 19

The past few chapters have been all about overcoming wrong thoughts and behaviors, and the theme has been clear—replace

the bad habit with something better. “Former things” must be forgotten. When we are in Christ, the old goes, and “all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). One key with breaking a habit, ironically, is to think of it not as the process of breaking a habit, but of forming a new habit. Rather than being addicted to lust, become “addicted” to purity.

And even more than one new habit, “all things” are becoming new. If you allow, Jesus will transform your life and your mind in ways you never even considered—like rivers in the desert. But that requires living in a whole new way.

This includes, of course, not putting yourself in the way of temptation. Why men who are trying to overcome lust would ever watch sports on TV boggles the mind. Satan is having a field day with the playground of the male brain, while he sits on the couch, eats potato chips, and watches sexual advertisements, cheer leaders, etc. Is it wise to visit certain beaches or walk down certain aisle at the mall if you’re trying to avoid impure imagery? Is it a good idea to go down the fiction aisle at the library or consume certain types of media if you’re trying to avoid love-sick sentimentalism? If someone you know is diverting your thoughts from Christ, is it a good idea to be around them?

All these questions imply major changes—old things passing away, and all things becoming new. What triggers lustful or inappropriate thoughts and behaviors in your life? Identify those triggers, and deliberately plan a new way of living that avoids them and replaces them with something better—an exercise plan, a cooking or building project, a reading commitment—literally anything that is within God’s vast garden of pleasures that He has given to us. The best options involve blessing and serving others, doing outreach, and winning souls. But again, don’t fixate on the forbidden, but immerse yourself gratefully and enthusiastically in the many facets of life that God offers. Become “addicted” to something better.

All of this requires some deliberate planning. Why did Jotham become mighty? “Because he prepared his ways before the Lord his God” (2 Chronicles 27:6). “Commit your works to the Lord, and your thoughts will be established” (Proverbs 16:3). This implies

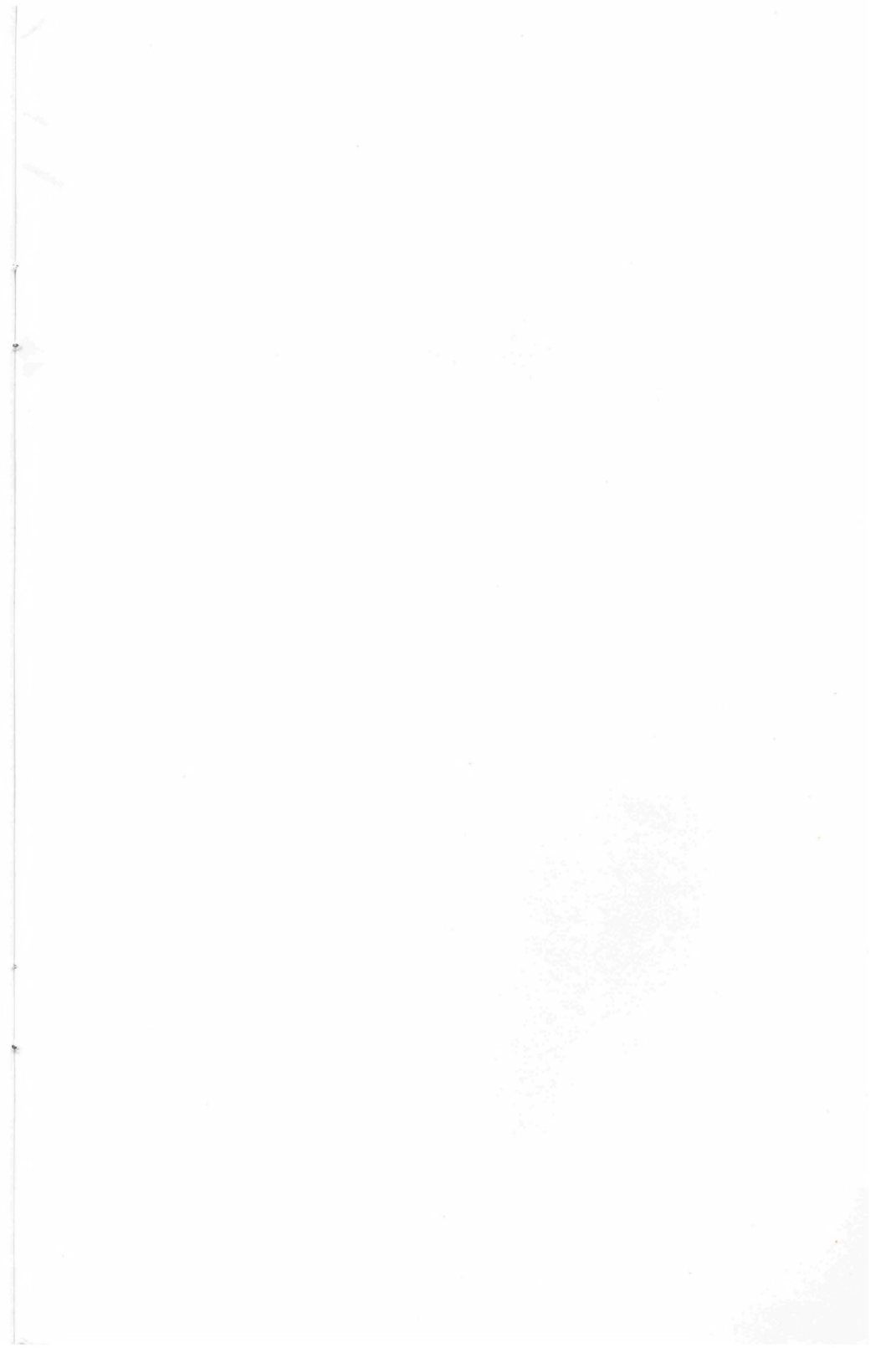
that we have thoughts, plans, and works to commit to God, and that we are not living haphazard lives of impulse. Budget your time just like you should budget your money. If you don't make a plan for it, then you end up in old habits.

Also, changing your diet for the better will bring a huge benefit. Many people don't realize that the moral wreck they've made of their lives is because of the poor condition of their digestive tract. And gaining victory over appetite will be a wonderful help in overcoming other wrong desires.

“The controlling power of appetite will prove the ruin of thousands, when, if they had conquered on this point, they would have had moral power to gain the victory over every other temptation of Satan. But those who are slaves to appetite will fail in perfecting Christian character. —*Maranatha*, p. 62

So, where is God taking us next? To this state and beyond God desires to lead each one of us:

If we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses.... Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us. —*The Desire of Ages*, p. 668



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US\$5.99



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